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LESSONS IN MURAL DECORATION.

I.

FOR decorative purposes the choice of media lies virtually between oil and tempera. Both are cheap, facile in application, needing but very simple preparatory grounding, admit a greater number of pigments than other vehicles, and can be used upon any surface at pleasure. They neither require exceptional surface like fresco, encaustic, and stereo-chrome, nor is there any limit to the amount of work which may be executed in a day. Also they are free from the necessity of fixing as in water-glass, or fusing by heat as encaustic, yielding, as they may be said to do, both to these and also to fresco in the point of absolute permanency; yet as, under properly favorable conditions, a duration of two or three hundred years may safely be expected for both oil and distemper, they cannot be said to be dangerous or fugitive vehicles. "Under properly favorable circumstances"—that is, that the situation be reasonably dry, the edifice sufficiently drained and ventilated, and the stone or plaster surface free from damp. If these be not secured, no medium can be expected to behave in a satisfactory manner.

The respective merits, however, of tempera and oil are opposed; the former being best able to cope with the natural dampness of stone or plaster, i.e., internal damp, the latter possessing most power against the damp proceeding from without. The reason of this appears to be as follows: Stone is in a greater or lesser degree of an essentially damp and cold nature—the minute pores and holes which permeate its substance form so many little spiracles or breathing places, which give passage to the damp to rise to the surface. Although by careful choice of stone, by proper precautions in building, draining, and ventilation, a stone wall may always be rendered sufficiently serviceable for decorative purposes, yet to a certain degree damp must always exist. Now when successive coats of oil-paint have been applied to the inner surface of a stone or plaster wall, a liquid has been used repugnant and contrary to the nature of the internal damp. The air-holes are stopped up, and as the stone still desires to breathe through, a battle ensues between the water and the oil, which after a time ends in the latter being pushed off from within, and detached in minute scales or powder.

Hence the defect of an oily vehicle against internal damp. At the same time as each grain and particle of color is "locked up" in the stout body of oil, it is effectually preserved against external damp, which cannot push or drive it into the wall, and hence glides off from its surface harmlessly.

Now in tempera the reverse holds good. The

thinness of the aqueous vehicle prevents the stone pores being stopped up, and allows the passage of air freely, thus causing no internal warfare, while on the other hand, that very tenuity of body affords little or no protection against the attack of damp from without.

Added to this, it may be said that the nature of the size employed, being animal, must after a time suffer decay and liberate the imprisoned color. Still, under ordinary circumstances, the time required to effect these destructive changes is so extended, that with



DESIGN FOR SGRAFFITO DECORATION.

proper precautions the amateur may regard both his distemper and oil vehicles as quite sufficient for his purposes, sparing himself much trouble about the various mixtures—nostrums which from time to time arise. In two respects the balance will be in favor of distemper, as it possesses the property of drying both flat, i.e., unshining, and quick, the former of which is essential, the latter always desirable in decoration.

For the preparation of walls for commencing the decoration of a church or other building, the first

rubble walls any better. Perhaps brick, well plastered, is the best surface attainable for all cases; whether stone or plaster be used, some period should be allowed to elapse between building and decoration—in plaster more particularly, as the kinds vary much, Parian requiring only three or four days; mastic (which is used in oil) taking a fortnight or more, while the ordinary plaster should not be touched for six or eight weeks.

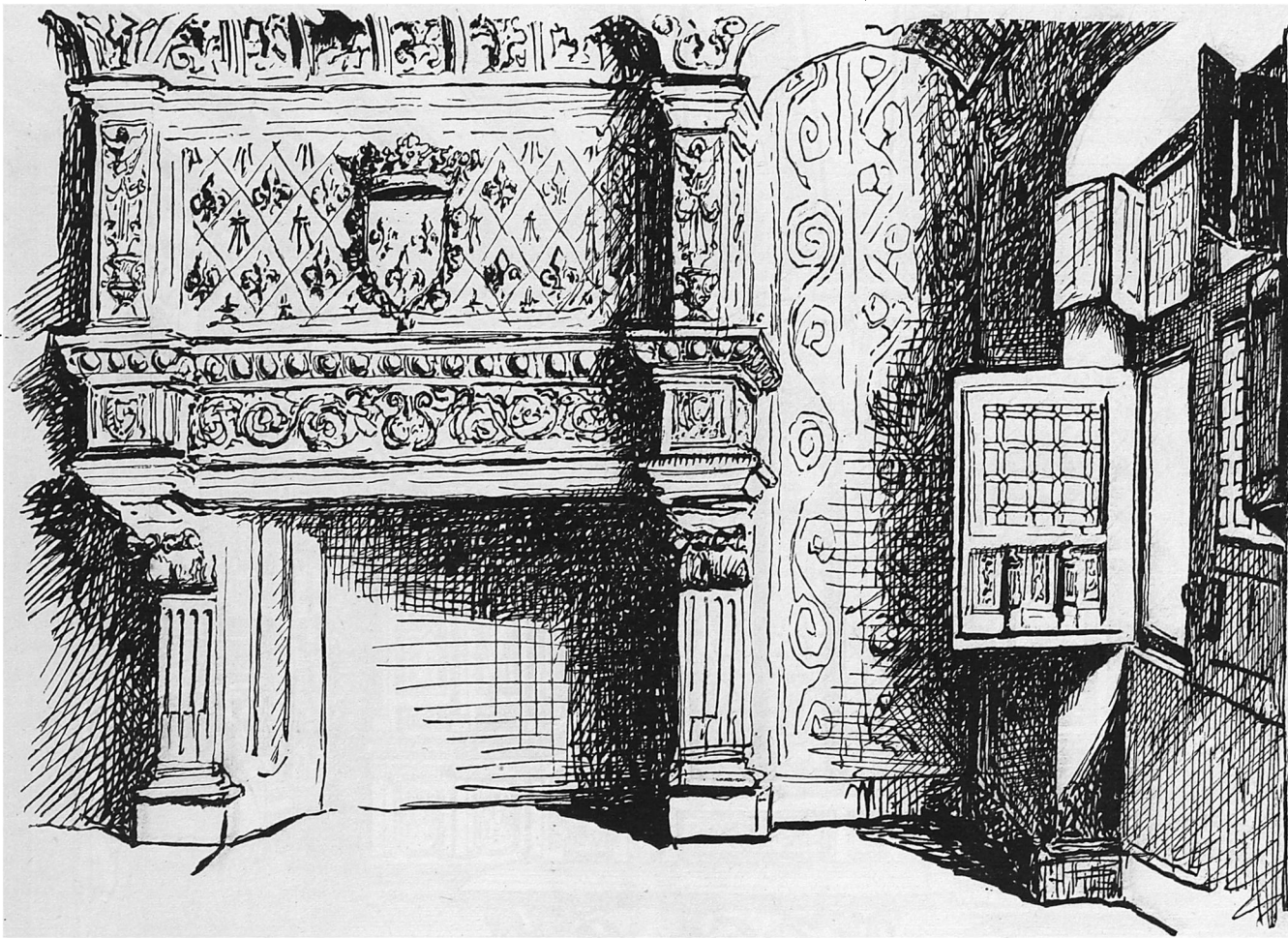
To prepare a brick surface unplastered for decoration melt down a sufficient quantity of size in a saucepan or earthen pot, and add twice its bulk of water. Having dusted the walls down, brush them well with this solution, using a large spreading brush, and taking care to cover the ground well.

This will be sufficient preparation both for oil and tempera, when the brickwork is to be retained as a ground. In the same way, stone may be prepared for coloring, the delicate varied natural white of the stone being infinitely preferable to any white ground in distemper or oil.

To prepare stone for coloring and gilding in oil, retaining it as a ground, melt in a pipkin or clean paint-pot one ounce of virgin white wax, adding sufficient turpentine to reduce it to the consistency of milk; add to this French oil varnish ad libitum, to make your wash flow easily, and a little sacrum (prepared sugar of lead) to cause it to dry flat. Apply warm with a large brush. This will very slightly darken the tint of the stone, and will form a good ground for painting in oil.

When it is wished to color a wall in tempera, not

retaining the plaster or stone as a ground, the following order must be observed: First mend any broken parts with a mixture of putty and plaster of Paris neatly put on with a spatula or palette-knife, and smoothed down. Then brush over the walls with a size composed of one pound of good glue dissolved in one gallon of hot water, thickened with some red lead, or else with size as described before. Give this sufficient time to dry. Now proceed to make your ground color, which we will suppose to be what is usual-



PEN SKETCH BY LEON Y. ESCOSURA.

CORNER IN A ROOM IN HIS HOUSE AT BLOIS, FORMERLY THE RESIDENCE OF THE DUC DE GUISE. REPRODUCED FROM A LETTER FROM THE ARTIST TO N. SARONY.

thing to be done is to have some competent opinion as to the fitness of the walls, plaster, and stone-work for receiving color. To this end it will be best to take the advice of some builder, who, on knowing the nature of the soil, materials employed, drainage, and the time which has elapsed since building, can give a sufficient decision as to the safety or danger of coloring. As a general rule, however, it may be observed that ashlar walls, being composed of free stones as they come from the quarry, are likely to be bad, as the dampness of the atmosphere condensing on the wall in warm weather makes them wet. Nor are

ly called vellum tint, as follows:

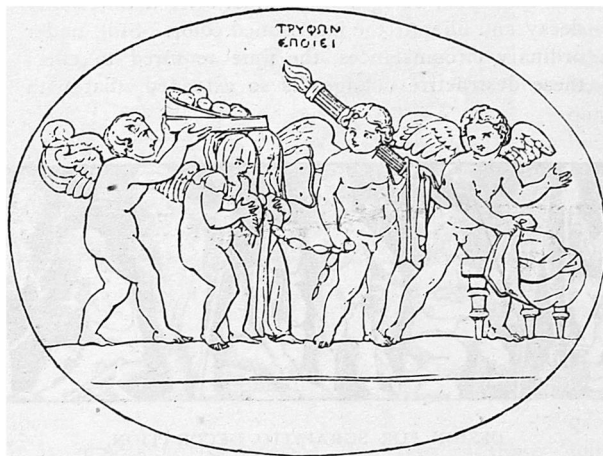
In a large double-sized paint-pot put three pounds of gilder's whiting, cover it with water, and let it be until it is perfectly broken up and saturated, and the effervescence has subsided. Then pour off the water and stir with a thick stick, until the mass has attained the consistency of dough. Melt some size not diluted, and pour upon the whiting, stirring up well, and then straining while warm to free from impurities. Let this stand several days in a cool place until it is formed into a weak, trembling jelly, so as to be worked with ease with a stiff brush. Before the size is added, it

may be stained to any tint which is desired by the addition of the proper color, ground in water. It should be observed that all colors in distemper dry lighter than when first applied, so that the only way to secure the requisite tint is to make experiments upon a piece of paper or card until the proper tint is reached. The color must then be applied to the walls in its cold and jellied state.

For this purpose, use a large hog's-hair brush, and work with decision and freedom, taking care not to retouch any portion of the work, but to cover the ground well as you proceed. The wall should be divided by your eye into squares, advancing from one to another in regular succession, and, of course, beginning from above. Unless for some special purpose, your ground should never be pure white, but be stained, however little, with black, blue, ochre or chrome yellow to take off the raw appearance; where a colored ground is needed, proceed in the same way as above described, commencing with the larger or smaller quantity of whiting, and tempering it in the color to the degree required.

To prepare walls in oil, first give a coat of glue size as in tempera. Follow this up with two or three thin coats of boiled linseed oil, with some red lead and litharge added. This must be applied to the wall quite warm to prevent its scaling off. After this, the wall should be well rubbed down with glass and sandpaper, and dusted if a very fair finish is required. For the second coat in vellum tint, grind white lead in equal parts of raw linseed oil and turpentine, adding some litharge as dryers. Heighten your color to the tint

as otherwise it will look uneven and streaky. For vellum tint, white lead, tinged with ochre, etc., to the desired tint, should be ground in spirits of turpentine and a little oil and dryers until quite thick and viscid. It may then be strained through a coarse cloth and thinned to the necessary degree, taking care to match



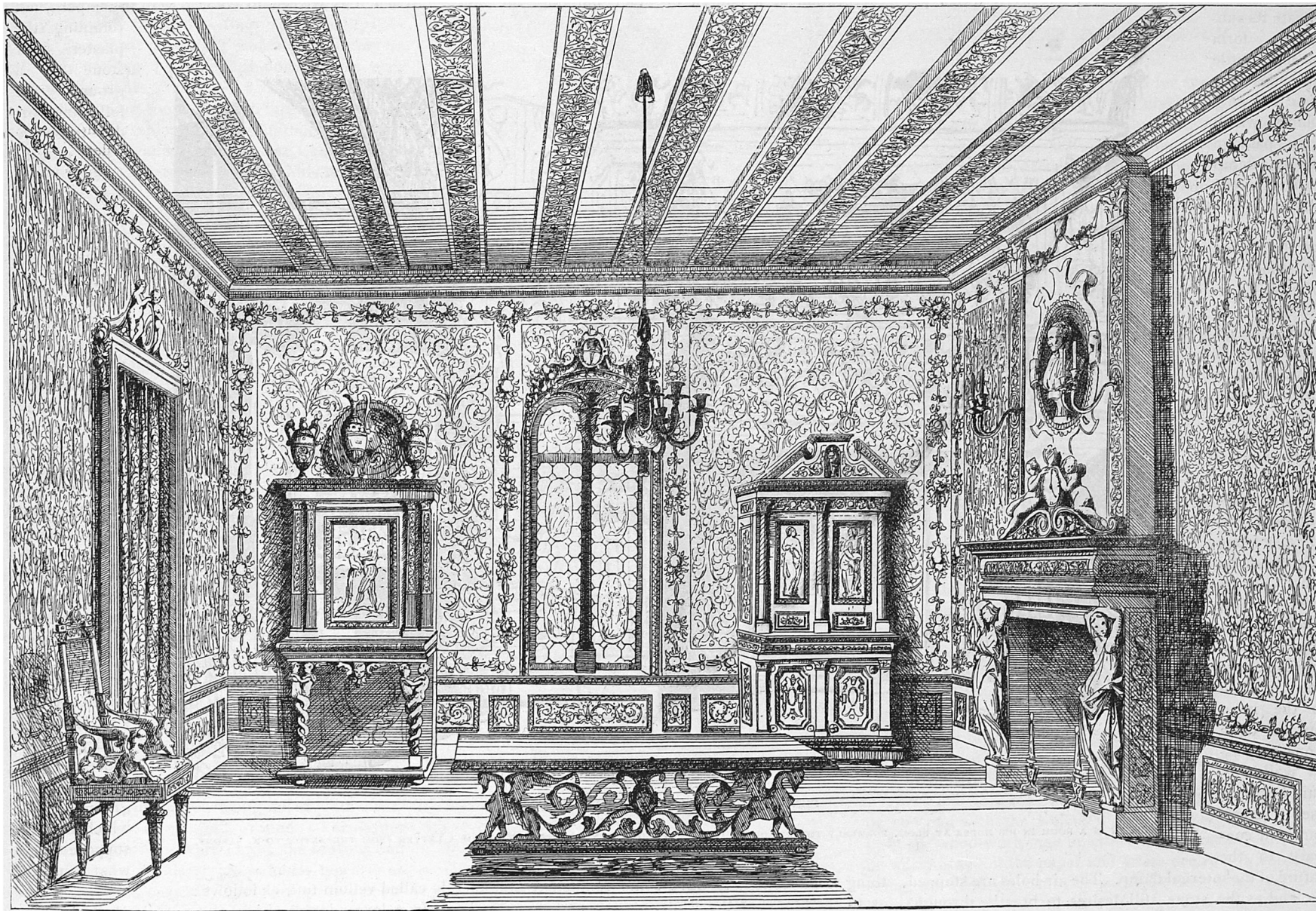
"THE WEDDING." FROM AN ANTIQUE CAMEO.

the tint from any remnant of the last coat of oil. In applying it, observe the following directions: If the wall or surface to be flatted be too high to be washed conveniently, a small scaffold should be fixed along it so that any one standing upon it can reach with ease to the top. Having the color properly prepared, and using a large soft spreading brush, commence at the

mence where you left off and carry the work upward, observing exactly the same directions, so that the two workers may follow each other up and gradually complete the work.

All oil colors for use in decoration should dry flat and unshining. For this purpose various substances called technically "dryers" require to be mixed with them, care being taken not to mix too much, as this exactly defeats the desired end. The principal dryers are the acetate or sugar of lead, litharge, sulphate of zinc or white vitriol, and japanner's gold size, which is really oil boiled upon litharge. The amateur should observe that some of these dryers act injuriously upon certain colors—for instance, oxides of lead upon such light and tender colors as lake, etc.—and also that a mixture of two dryers, as sugar of lead and vitriol, although sometimes recommended, is bad for chemical reasons. The colors should be ground in oil, the necessary amount of dryers added, and then the mass thinned with turpentine to the consistency required.

The amateur should take great care always to clean the stone after any color has been ground by rubbing, with a cloth and fine sand, and afterward wiping down with turpentine. Brushes and pencils in oil should also be cleaned after use, first in turpentine and then afterward in warm water, and soap. They should be well wiped and then placed on a sloping board, one end resting in cold water, which will keep them supple. It should be observed, however, that the pencil must not on any account rest on its point, as this invariably ruins it. Large tools, after washing, are best left to soak in cold water.



APARTMENT DECORATED IN MODERN RENAISSANCE STYLE.

desired with ochre or raw sienna, and apply with a large soft hog's hair brush. The third coat will be made and applied in the same way. In two or three days the third coat will be ready to receive what is technically called its flatting, which should be put on before the last coat of oil paint has dried quite hard,

bottom and work upward to the scaffold, taking about a foot or a foot and a half at a time, then cross your work horizontally and finish by "laying off" your work from the bottom upward, and then from the top downward. As you finish each strip or portion of your work, some one on the scaffold must com-

In distemper, it is as well to have a large pot of whiting prepared as before described, and then to temper with it the other colors, red, blues, greens, etc., until the desired tint is reached. [A list of permanent colors and combinations will be given in the next number of this magazine.] T. GOODWIN.